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TEACHING NOTES

Whole of Society Conflict Prevention: Kenya's Contrasted with Afghanistan and Iraq

By Lisa Schirch*

This case study looks at the three inter-related concepts; conflict prevention, civil society, and a “whole of society” or comprehensive approach. It compares and contrasts the Whole of Society Approach to Conflict Prevention in Kenya with Afghanistan and Iraq. A brief literature review outlines the relevance of these three concepts to current security discussions. Lessons from what worked in Kenya and other countries illuminate the successes and failures of civil society efforts at conflict prevention in Iraq and Afghanistan where attention focused largely on the state and not civil society. In sum, the case study raises questions about how Coalition Forces have related to Afghan civil society since 2001 and in Iraq since 2003 and how they could have related in a way that better achieved US goals in reducing insurgency and building a stable democracy.

Objectives

1. To understand the relationship between conflict prevention, stabilization, reconstruction, counterinsurgency and other aspects of complex operations.
2. To identify conflict prevention activities in diverse contexts.
2. To appreciate local capacities contributing to conflict prevention.
3. To recognize diverse civil society contributions to conflict prevention, stabilization and human security.
3. To acknowledge that interagency coordination between U.S. agencies and between international forces can be so challenging that internationals ignore the dire need for coordinating and identifying local capacities.
5. To understand appropriate ways of communicating with local civil society in conflict-affected regions.
6. To understand the whole of society approach to stability and reconstruction.

Target Audiences

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U.S. government agency officials with national security responsibilities:

- National Security Council
- State Department
- U.S. Agency for International Development
- Office of the Secretary of State/Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization
- Commerce Department
- High-level U.S. military staffs (Joint Staff, regional commands)
- Potential senior military leaders
- Civil-military planners
- Civil Affairs officers
- Army Reserves planning and employment in support of operations

Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes to be Considered in this Case Study

1. Knowledge of civil society
2. Knowledge of conflict prevention
3. Knowledge of whole of government approach.
4. Knowledge of whole of society comprehensive approach
5. Knowledge of civil society-military relations
6. Skills in assessing local capacity for conflict prevention, stabilization and related efforts
7. Attitudes that recognize and value local capacities and the role of civil society in general.
8. Attitudes that recognize the security risks that local civil society may face for communicating with foreigners.

Process for Delivering Case Study

1. Assign the case study as a read-ahead.
2. Priming Discussion at the beginning of class

In a large group setting, lead a discussion with the class on the roles and nature of civil society in the United States. Where does civil society contribute to governance functions in the United States? What would the US look like if there were no civil society organizations, only government structures? Imagine for example, there were no quality private universities to attend and no independent media? What if there were no civil society groups asking Congress to be accountable for public tax dollars or pressing for transparency in Congressional decision-making?

3. Analysis and Process

Break the class into small groups of 4-6 people each. If possible, have the students locate themselves in whatever organizational roles they aspire to obtain. From that perspective have them discuss the following questions as they would

- a) What relevance could local civil society have to my job in this foreign country?
- b) How would I go about learning about local civil society perspectives in general?
- c) How would I go about learning which local civil society groups are working or researching areas relevant to my job?
- d) How would I go about contacting a local civil society organization in a way that recognizes the security dangers they might face for communicating with me?

Related Homework assignment:

1. Ask students to find each of the following:
 - a) A blog written by an individual blogger in this country.
 - b) A research report from a local NGO or think tank or university in this country.
 - c) A research report from an international NGO, think tank or university about this country.
2. Ask students to write a 5 page paper that includes the following:
 - a) a comparison of the different perspectives found in these written reports
 - b) a summary of the relevant information gathered that is relevant to conflict prevention assessment

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